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RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report responds to the mandate contained in General Assembly resolution 45/264, by which the Secretary-General was requested to submit an annual progress report on the restructuring and revitalization process. Chapter II of the report provides information on developments since the adoption of Assembly resolution 50/227, in particular regarding action taken thus far by the Economic and Social Council in implementing the resolution. In its resolution 50/227, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution at its fifty-second session, through the Council at its substantive session of 1997. That information will be before the Assembly next year. Chapter III of the report provides information on the activities of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996 on further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields represents an important step in the reform efforts currently under way directed at the economic and social sectors. At that time, the Secretary-General welcomed the adoption of the resolution. He stressed that this new resolution was the first to have emerged from a number of General Assembly working groups examining a wide range of issues relating to the reform and renewal of the Organization. Member States, he noted, had reached agreement on measures that reconfirm the validity of the United Nations role in operational activities for development, foster greater harmonization of the work of the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly, strengthen the capacity of the Economic and Social Council to fulfil its Charter responsibilities, and aim to further reinforce cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. The Secretary-General also stressed the significance of the initiative embodied in the resolution of launching a series of reviews to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the subsidiary bodies of the Council.

2. Although the present report is being submitted primarily in response to the mandate reflected in the annex to General Assembly resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields - in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit an annual progress report to the Assembly, starting with its forty-seventh session, on the implementation of the result of the restructuring and revitalization process in the economic, social and related fields, which would provide information on any recommendation agreed upon which had not been implemented as scheduled - it also provides information on developments since the adoption of resolution 50/227, especially in relation to actions taken by the Economic and Social Council in implementing the resolution. Consequently, chapter II of the present report contains information and offers a number of observations on the efforts made thus far by the Economic and Social Council to implement the resolution. The present report is the fifth of its kind (see A/47/534, A/48/639, A/49/558 and Add.1 and A/50/697 and Corr.1 and Add.1).

3. It may be recalled that General Assembly resolution 48/162 of 20 December 1993 on further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields provided for a comprehensive review of the implementation of that resolution, as well as of decisions on financing, at the fiftieth session of the Assembly. The Assembly had called for additional efforts to be made to improve further the functioning of the United Nations in the field of operational activities, and had specified that the review would include consideration of the effectiveness of the measures taken to improve the working methods of the Executive Boards, the possible need for a further modification in the size of the Boards and options for further improving the effectiveness of and representation on those Boards, taking into account the need to combine universality with efficiency and to ensure transparency in decision-making. The outcome of the comprehensive review is reflected in General Assembly resolution 50/227, wherein the Secretary-General has been requested to report to the Assembly at its fifty-second session,

through the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997, on the implementation of the resolution; hence, the requisite documentation will be before the Council and the Assembly next year.

4. Chapter III of the present report focuses on the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). More specifically, information concerning the work of the first two Boards is made available, as is data concerning the activities of the reconstituted Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes as the Executive Board of the World Food Programme.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227

5. At its 8th meeting, on 24 June 1996, the Economic and Social Council agreed to consider during its substantive session, under agenda item 1 (Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters), the question of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227 in terms of the provisions contained therein relating to the Council. To assist Member States in their discussions on the matter, the Secretariat submitted a background note, 1/ highlighting those aspects of the resolution that pertain to the Council. The note was revised by the Secretariat following the substantive session, 2/ taking into account actions taken by the Council during the session concerning the implementation of resolution 50/227.

6. The following paragraphs contain information and some observations on action taken thus far by the Economic and Social Council to implement the resolution. The material has been organized along the lines of the format of annex I to resolution 50/227; only those provisions of the resolution on which the Council has pronounced itself thus far and/or on which the present report has some specific observations to offer are included. Unless otherwise specified, it is assumed that the reports and reviews called for in the resolution are expected in time for the 1997 substantive session of the Council and the fifty-second session of the Assembly.

A. Funding of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

7. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/42 of 26 July 1996 on progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120, requested the Secretary-General, in his progress report on the implementation of resolution 50/120, for submission to the Council at its substantive session of 1997, among other things, to include an analytical assessment of the implications on operational activities for development of the recent trends in core and non-core resources and to make recommendations on how to increase core resources and effectively implement section I of annex I to resolution 50/227.

B. General Assembly

8. Attention is drawn to paragraph 25 of resolution 50/227, wherein the Assembly specifically called for a review during its fifty-first session of the arrangements in the General Assembly and in the Economic and Social Council for considering the coordination of humanitarian assistance and special economic assistance to individual countries and regions. In order to ensure, whenever possible, a common approach, each resolution could contain, to the extent possible and, as appropriate, a common preambular section, while specificity (individual needs) would be maintained within a number of operative paragraphs.

C. Documentation and related matters

9. The General Assembly noted that the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to prepare proposals, for consideration by the Council in 1996 and by the Assembly at its fifty-first session, on the simplification of existing reporting requirements, taking into account the reports that will be required for the follow-up to United Nations conferences. The Secretary-General discussed the matter in detail in his progress report to the Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/697 and Corr.1, sect. F) and would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the recommendations put forth in his previous report on the question. 3/ In particular, he would like to re-emphasize the following measures in regard to control and limitation of documentation:

(a) Establishing a 16-page limit for reports prepared by the Secretariat for the Economic and Social Council or one of its subsidiary bodies. The production of addenda to such reports would be strictly limited to that which is included in the legislative mandate. The 24-page limit would continue to apply to consolidated reports that cover more than a single legislative mandate (see para. (e) below);

(b) Limiting the reports of the functional commissions and the subsidiary bodies of the Council to (i) a brief discussion on organizational and procedural matters and (ii) recommendations, including resolutions and decisions adopted. The current practice of including an extensive summary of the discussion during the session should be discontinued;

(c) Requesting the Secretariat, at the time of the adoption of a legislative mandate requesting documentation, to indicate whether the documentation could be prepared within existing staff and financial resources and, if not, to give the costs involved;

(d) Mandating the presentation of oral rather than written reports, particularly in regard to progress reports and reports that are presented on an annual basis;

(e) Encouraging the submission of a single "consolidated" report on related topics under a single item or sub-item of the agenda;

(f) Requesting the Secretariat to compile for the Council and for each of its subsidiary bodies a list of documents mandated in resolutions and decisions

to be adopted at a given session in order to give members a clear picture of all documentation requested and to include in the report on the status of documentation for a given session a list of all reports already mandated for the coming year;

(g) Making increased efforts at biennialization or triennialization of agenda items or sub-items. The Council and its subsidiary bodies should consider if, in fact, the majority of agenda items need to be examined on an annual basis.

D. Economic and Social Council

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

10. It may be recalled that in its decision 1995/321 of 12 December 1995, the Council had decided that it would decide at its organizational session for 1996 on the allocation of a number of meetings, within the general segment of its substantive session of 1996, to determine how to ensure harmonization and coordination of the agendas and multi-year programmes of work of its functional commissions. To facilitate the Council's consideration of the matter, the Secretariat prepared a background paper on the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and multi-year programmes of work of the functional commissions of the Council. 4/ At its substantive session of 1996, the Council adopted resolution 1996/36 of 26 July 1996 on the follow-up to the major international United Nations conferences and summits, including the implementation of their respective programmes of action, wherein it decided that the Council should continue to ensure, on a regular basis, the harmonization and coordination of the multi-year programmes of relevant functional commissions by promoting a clear division of labour among them and providing clear policy guidance to them.

11. In its resolution 1996/41 of 26 July 1996, entitled "Follow-up to General Assembly resolution 50/227: initiation of reviews", the Council decided to consider as a matter of priority, at its resumed substantive session to be held before the end of 1996, the possible changes in and/or adjustments to its agenda with a view to ensuring that all issues included in General Assembly resolution 50/227 would be examined by the Council.

12. The Secretary-General welcomes the directives of the Assembly, whereby the outcome of each segment of the Council should be strengthened and made more action-oriented, and panel discussions and interactive debates, with the participation of outside experts, non-governmental organizations and the business and academic communities, where appropriate, and in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Council, should be encouraged in parallel to the formal meetings of the Council. Both these notions are reflected in previous progress reports submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly. Attention is, at the same time, drawn to the implications of the Assembly's decision of modifying the length of the substantive session of the Council, which will be reduced from five weeks to four weeks as of 1997. Previous Assembly resolutions on restructuring and revitalization (45/264, 46/235 and 48/162), as well as resolution 50/227, refer only to the duration of the high-level and coordination segments. The Council, in turn, has in recent years

stipulated the length of the operational activities segment when deciding its programme of work for the substantive session. No legislation exists on the length of the general segment, which consequently has been "accommodated" within the remaining substantive session once the other three segments are scheduled. Consequently, the segment likely to be affected the most from the decision to limit the duration of the substantive session to four weeks is the general segment unless, of course, adjustments are made to the duration of the other segments. The general segment is recognized as an area of the Council's work that requires strengthening and rethinking. A concerted effort is therefore required to review and refocus the agenda of the general segment and to limit the number of reports that the Council is expected to examine during this segment.

E. High-level segment

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

13. The Council adopted resolution 1996/43 of 26 July 1996 on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions. Among the points raised in this resolution, the Council recommended, in order to better focus the policy dialogue, exploring the possibility of having joint reports prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and invited the financial and trade institutions participating in the high-level segment of the Council in 1997 to furnish relevant reports and studies on the selected theme, within their respective mandates and areas of expertise, and on important developments in the world economy and in international economic cooperation. The Council decided that, prior to the annual high-level policy dialogue, and allowing sufficient time for preparation, the Secretariat should communicate to the financial and trade institutions a report on the relevant issues to be discussed at the session, with a primary focus on the agreed theme; and that communication should be prepared in part based on the submission of issues and questions that Member States could be invited to suggest to the Secretariat, which would then be taken into account in the preparation of the Secretariat's report to the institutions.

14. Arrangements for the effective implementation of these provisions are being actively pursued within the Secretariat and in consultations with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. Related questions concerning the selection of theme, outcome and follow-up to the high-level segment of the Council were addressed in the previous progress report to the General Assembly. The decision to select the theme for this segment at the annual substantive session of the Council will provide adequate time for the necessary system-wide review and consultations that the preparation of the Secretary-General's report on the chosen theme requires. The intention to make the outcome of the segment more definitive than in the past is likewise welcomed. A note by the Secretary-General on the theme for the high-level segment of the substantive session of 1997 of the Council 5/ was made available by the Secretariat to assist the Council in its consultations on the matter.

F. General segment

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

15. The Council decided, in its resolution 1996/41, to consider as a matter of priority, at its resumed substantive session to be held before the end of 1996, a review of the agenda of the Council's general segment in accordance with paragraph 67 of annex I to General Assembly resolution 50/227.

G. Functional commissions and expert groups

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

16. In its resolution 1996/41, the Economic and Social Council reaffirmed that the review of the mandates, composition, functions and working methods of its functional commissions and expert groups and bodies should be completed by the fifty-second session of the Assembly and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive document compiling information on the mandates, composition, functions and working methods of the functional commissions and expert groups and bodies and to submit it to the Council not later than February 1997. The Council also decided to begin consideration during its substantive session of 1997 of the role, working methods and relationship with other bodies of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, the Committee for Development Planning, the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development and the Committee on Natural Resources. It requested the President of the Council to establish arrangements for informal open-ended consultations during the Council's substantive session of 1997; decided to include in the provisional agenda of its substantive session of 1997 an item entitled "Implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227"; and decided to further consider the review of the functional commission and expert groups and bodies comprehensively during a resumed substantive session in the autumn of 1997 and to take decisions at that time.

H. Regional commissions

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

17. In its resolution 1996/41, the Economic and Social Council requested the regional commissions to continue undertaking their own reviews, as called for in Assembly resolution 50/227, and to report to the Council at its substantive session of 1997. The Council reaffirmed the need for the above-mentioned reviews and reform processes currently being undertaken by the regional commissions to be carried out, aiming at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of those bodies by eliminating unnecessary duplication or overlapping of work and by ensuring a better structural relationship among those bodies and with the Council. The Council decided that it would take a decision at its substantive session of 1997 on further action on how to achieve the objectives set out in paragraphs 74 and 75 of annex I to Assembly resolution 50/227, taking into account the above-mentioned reviews.

I. Inter-agency coordination

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

18. In resolution 1996/36, the Council invited the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) to present the reports on the work of its task forces on an enabling environment for economic and social development, basic social services for all, and employment and sustainable livelihoods, as well as on inter-agency committees on sustainable development and women and gender equality, to the substantive session of 1997 of the Council and to identify policy and coordination issues to be addressed by the Council and the General Assembly.

19. This decision should be read in the context of paragraphs 80 and 81 of annex I to Assembly resolution 50/227, addressed to ACC, which provided that the Committee should have an enhanced function for inter-agency coordination purposes for the United Nations system, and continue to meet for this purpose on a regular basis under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General, at the head-of-agency level, to review and advise on coordination matters; it should continue to report to the Council; continue to make use of small task forces at the operational levels to develop joint inter-agency programmes, as appropriate; present the thematic aspects of its report to the Council at its coordination segment and the remaining parts at the general segment; and its members should engage in an active dialogue with the Council on ways to improve inter-agency coordination. Paragraph 82 of annex I to the resolution, whereby the periodic meetings of all concerned senior secretariat officials in the economic and social sectors, under the authority of the Secretary-General, should continue to be used to improve coordination and performance, and the outcomes of those meetings should be presented on a regular basis to the Economic and Social Council, is likewise relevant to the provision of effective support to the Council in the exercise of its policy coordination functions. The forthcoming senior officials meeting, as well as the second regular session of ACC for 1996, will focus on issues relating to the strengthening and reform of the United Nations system. The most effective follow-up to be given to the above provisions of Council resolution 1996/36 and General Assembly resolution 50/227, as well as to those concerning relationships between the United Nations and the international finance and trade institutions, will be given special attention in the context of these discussions. Relevant aspects of the implementation of these resolutions were also specifically addressed at the most recent session of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions.

J. Relationship between the United Nations and international finance and trade institutions

Action taken by the Economic and Social Council

20. As mentioned in paragraph 13 above, the Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1996, took action in this area by adopting resolution 1996/43, wherein, inter alia, it recommended exploring the possibility of joint reports and invited the financial and trade institutions to furnish relevant reports and studies on the selected theme for the high-level segment of the Council in 1997. In the same resolution, the Council stated that it looked

forward to the report and accompanying recommendations to be prepared jointly by the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions on an early exploratory review to assess mechanisms, programmes and relationships at the field, headquarters and intergovernmental levels, with a view to identifying areas in which communication, cooperation and coordination could be improved.

21. In terms of the Assembly's request for a high-level special meeting of the Council, the Council recommended, in resolution 1996/43, the scheduling of a high-level special meeting at a time proximate to the semi-annual meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions as called for in resolution 50/227. It requested the Secretary-General to consult the heads of the financial institutions by early 1997. The results of ongoing consultations on the subject will be conveyed to the Council, at a session to be held in early 1997, when the Council is expected to discuss the format, timing and possible agenda for the first such meeting.

K. Requests addressed to working groups of the General Assembly

22. Some of the provisions contained in resolution 50/227 are addressed to either the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, the Open-ended Working Group on an Agenda for Development or both.

23. More specifically, the General Assembly encouraged the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System to consider, in the context of the debate on all the Main Committees of the General Assembly, promoting the use of innovative mechanisms, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, such as panel discussions with delegations and interactive debates, with the active participation of Secretariat and agency representatives as well as outside experts. The Assembly also requested the Working Group to consider the role and the working methods of the Committee for Programme and Coordination within the context of Assembly decision 47/454 of 23 December 1992, with a view to finding ways of improving coordination functions throughout the United Nations system. In this context, the Assembly requested the Group to give consideration, inter alia, to the roles and responsibilities of the Economic and Social Council and the Committee for Programme and Coordination with respect to coordination. Similarly, the Assembly requested this Working Group, and the Open-ended Working Group on an Agenda for Development, to consider a number of questions concerning the present structure and functioning of the Secretariat and of United Nations programmes and funds.

24. In addition, the Working Group on an Agenda for Development was requested, as noted earlier, to carry out a close review of the relationship of the Economic and Social Council with the specialized agencies, with the Council providing overall guidance and coordination, identifying points of duplication with funds and programmes, and making recommendations, as appropriate and necessary. The Assembly also asked that the issues relating to the strengthening of the relationship between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, and possibly also the World Trade Organization, should be

particularly considered in the context of the deliberations on an agenda for development, as foreseen in resolution 47/181 of 22 December 1992.

III. GOVERNING BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND FUNDS

25. The Secretary-General has provided information on the governing bodies of the United Nations development programmes and funds in his progress reports on restructuring and revitalization submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions (A/49/558 and Add.1 and A/50/697 and Corr.1 and Add.1). When he first reported on the subject, the Secretary-General provided information on the then newly established Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF. The following year, which coincided with the comprehensive review of General Assembly resolution 48/162, the results of the activities of those two Boards to date were documented, as were the question of a separate Executive Board for UNFPA and the arrangements relating to the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes of the World Food Programme. Regarding the latter, information was provided, inter alia, on the consultations between the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for that purpose, in view of the fact that WFP is an autonomous joint organ of both. This process was expected to lead to the adoption of parallel resolutions by the General Assembly and the Conference of FAO.

26. Concerning the overall subject of the governing bodies of the United Nations programmes and funds, the most recent directives of the General Assembly are to be found in paragraphs 76 through 78 of annex I to resolution 50/227. These should be read in conjunction with the provisions contained in section III.3 of annex I to resolution 48/162. With respect to the question of a separate Executive Board of UNFPA, the Assembly has taken no decision thus far.

27. With respect to the Executive Board of the World Food Programme, the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/8 of 1 November 1995, decided, subject to the concurrence of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, that the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes should be reconstituted as the Executive Board of the World Food Programme, with 36 members elected from among the States Members of the United Nations or the States members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and that the Economic and Social Council and the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations should elect 18 members each, as set forth in paragraph 2 of the resolution. The Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council, at its resumed substantive session of 1995, to elect 18 members of the Executive Board for a term beginning on 1 January 1996, in accordance with the specific distribution and terms of office as set forth in paragraph 4 of the resolution. The Assembly also decided to approve the revised General Regulations of the World Food Programme contained in annex I to the note by the Secretary-General on the transformation of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes of the World Food Programme into an executive board, 6/ as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1995/227 of 6 June 1995 and by the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations at its 108th session, on 12 June 1995. The

Assembly further decided, subject to the concurrence of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, that the revised General Regulations should enter into force on 1 January 1996. A parallel resolution on the transformation of the governing body of WFP was adopted by the Conference of FAO on 31 October 1995 (resolution 9/95). Thus, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes was reconstituted as the Executive Board of WFP with effect from 1 January 1996.

28. The Economic and Social Council proceeded with the election of States Members of the United Nations to the Executive Board of the World Food Programme and determined the initial terms of office of the members of the Board in its decisions 1995/326, 1996/201, 1996/222 and 1996/298.

29. The material presented in the remainder of this chapter updates the contents of the previous progress reports of the Secretary-General insofar as the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF are concerned, and discusses for the first time the activities of the new Executive Board of the World Food Programme.

A. Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/ United Nations Population Fund

30. The Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA held four sessions in 1996: first regular session (15-19 January); second regular session (25-29 March); annual session (6-17 May); and third regular session (9-13 September).

31. The Executive Board continues to operate on the consensus principle in its work, which was carried out in a businesslike manner. Building on the experience of the previous two years, the discussions of the Board were marked by the absence of written statements and characterized by a spirit of dialogue, in which members and observers participated. Even though there were some particularly sensitive issues before the Board, overall documentation showed a decrease of more than 50 per cent compared to that of the average in the former Governing Council. The Board held informal meetings, briefings and consultations scheduled between and during sessions to deal with difficult issues and thereby facilitate their discussion at the sessions.

32. At its second regular session, the Executive Board adopted decision 96/11, which sets up a new system for the allocation of UNFPA resources for country programmes for the coming years; UNFPA will report on the implementation of decision 96/15 concerning allocation of resources to country programmes of UNFPA in the year 2000. The Board also adopted decision 96/16 on the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

33. The annual session was scheduled earlier than in previous years to ensure that the report thereon could be submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session, in accordance with legislation adopted by the Council in 1995. At the same time, the report of the Administrator 7/ and the report of the Executive Director 8/ to the Council were considered by the Board and transmitted to the Council with annexes containing pertinent extracts from the annual and second regular sessions. The reports were more thorough, detailed

and analytical in response to past concerns of delegations; their common format, agreed upon by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, represented a useful development in joint reporting to the Council and in facilitating the work of delegations. In a similar vein, the Board noted with appreciation the comm tment expressed by both UNDP and UNFPA to achieve harmonized budgetary procedures and stressed the importance of having the new procedures in place for the biennium 1998-1999.

34. The Executive Board also endorsed at its annual session the mission statement of UNDP and that of UNFPA. In addition, the Board adopted decisions on the UNFPA work plan for 1997-2000; on UNDP agency support costs; and on the United Nations Office for Project Services.

35. At its third regular session, the Executive Board addressed the financial, budgetary and administrative matters of both UNDP and UNFPA. The annual financial reviews of both organizations were considered, including the UNDP Reserve for Field Accommodation. In addition, the Board approved the revised budget estimates of UNDP and of the United Nations Office for Project Services for the biennium 1996-1997. Concerning UNDP matters, the Board addressed the questions of voluntary contributions to core resources and programme delivery.

36. Of particular note in its segment in the third regular session devoted to UNFPA affairs was the decision of the Executive Board to pursue the possibility of its membership in the UNICEF-WHO Joint Committee on Health Policy (96/38).

37. Also at the third regular session, turning its attention to the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Executive Board considered the independent evaluation of the Fund, which had been carried out by an international consultant firm. The Board appreciated the initial actions taken by the Fund following the recommendations of the evaluation and noted the good recovery the Fund had made from its financial problems of the previous year. In its decision 96/43, the Board decided, inter alia, that the Fund should produce a concise strategy and supporting business plan that would emphasize its catalytic, mainstreaming and advocacy roles.

38. Throughout its sessions in 1996, the Executive Board continued to pay close attention to the streamlining of its working methods and, in this connection, building on the work of the working group on documentation, adopted decision 96/45 dealing with the quality, production and distribution of documentation; with the firm base provided by the open-ended ad hoc working group on rules of procedure, it refined further its discussion on the proposed rules of procedure with a view to finalizing them in early 1997; and examined closely the draft work plan, which would facilitate even further the businesslike approach that it had successfully established.

B. Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund

39. The information provided in this section of the report covers the activities of the Executive Board of UNICEF from July 1995 to June 1996, which include the third regular session of 1995 (18-22 September); the first regular session of 1996 (22-26 January); the second regular session (9-12 April); the annual session (3-7 June) and the third regular session (16 to 19 September).

40. At the third regular session of 1995, the Board had a lengthy discussion of its working methods and procedures. The discussion touched on some of the issues addressed in resolution 50/227, including the rationalization of work. There was agreement in principle that the number of strategy papers presented to the Board in a given year be limited, and support was expressed for the establishment of a time-frame for reviewing major strategies. It was generally agreed that the secretariat should provide a table, to be considered annually at the third regular session, indicating the subjects (including major policy issues or themes) included on the agenda of the previous year, the present year and the two subsequent years. On the basis of that table, the Board, guided by the Bureau, will review the subjects planned for inclusion on the agendas of the following two years, with a view to eliminating items that are no longer relevant or that bear less frequent reporting, and to further streamline the Board's agendas. Most Board members agreed that the number of pages in documents should be limited.

41. At the first regular session of 1996, the Board, on the recommendation of the Executive Director, decided to discontinue a number of documents that had been produced annually. In addition, instead of having formal, written reports prepared by the secretariat, the Board has had oral reports presented on several issues during the past year, thus reducing the amount of documentation submitted to the Office of Conference and Support Services.

42. As part of the management reform of UNICEF currently under way, the Executive Director has established a team to review the relationship between the Executive Board and the secretariat. That team, which has met several times with the Bureau and various Board members, has surveyed Board members about a number of procedural issues and working methods. In addition, Board members had several rounds of consultations to examine different areas of responsibility of the secretariat and the Executive Board. An item on the outcome of these consultations has been added to the agenda for the first regular session of the Board in January 1997. During the past year, the Executive Director scheduled a number of inter-sessional consultations to keep Board members abreast of developments under the Management Excellence Programme.

43. With regard to paragraph 76 of annex I to resolution 50/227:

(a) Concerning the proliferation of meetings, the Executive Board was able to complete two of its sessions one day earlier than planned and to complete the others one-half day ahead of schedule owing mainly to good organization of work and the timely availability of documents. The Board also made a concerted effort to shorten the length of interventions, respecting a "traffic light" signalling device to indicate when the allotted time had passed. In addition, delegations worked informally to reach consensus on draft decisions, thus avoiding lengthy drafting sessions during the meetings. The secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau and the Office of Conference and Support Services, was successful in scheduling the Board sessions as much as possible back-to-back to sessions of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board to avoid overlap and to enable delegates from capitals to attend both sessions, if necessary. The Board also rescheduled the annual session so that it would not conflict with the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). The secretariat has

scheduled a four-day duration for the second and third regular sessions of the Board in 1997.

(b) Regarding improvement of the setting of the agenda, at the third regular session of 1995, the Board allocated items to the agendas of each of its four sessions for 1996. Subsequently, at each session, the Board reviewed the agenda for the following session and made adjustments as necessary, depending on the availability of documentation or other circumstances. As a result, some items were postponed to future sessions or deleted from or added to the agenda for the year. The Board was thus able to decide on oral reports on issues in place of written ones. The draft agenda for each session is prepared by the secretariat and approved by the Board at least six weeks prior to each session. At the pre-session briefings organized in compliance with resolution 48/162, both member and observer delegations have the opportunity to comment on and suggest changes to the draft agendas and timetable for the session, which are then incorporated into the final document adopted by the Board at the start of each formal session. For the 1997 sessions, segment titles have been proposed for each of the four sessions.

44. With regard to paragraph 77 of annex I to resolution 50/227, the Executive Director reported to the Executive Board on the implementation of the overall policy guidance provided by the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1996. That report 9/ and the Board's comments thereon were transmitted to the Council following the session. In addition, the annual report of UNICEF to the Council 10/ addressed all issues requiring discussion as a result of Council decisions. An extract from the report of the Executive Board on its 1996 annual session 11/ transmitted to the Council the decisions adopted by the Board at that session and a summary of the Board's discussion on harmonization of budget presentations.

45. With regard to paragraph 78 of annex I to resolution 50/227, on the participation of observers, the Executive Board discussed this issue when it adopted its revised rules of procedure 12/ in 1994, to take into account the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/162. An observer has the right to participate when its country programme is under consideration. All observers have the right to participate in the deliberations of the Executive Board. They are requested to inform the secretariat in advance of their interest in particular agenda items. The list of observers that have done so and the items of their interest are read out at the start of each session. During debates of the Executive Board, members have the right to take the floor first, followed by observers that have indicated an interest in the agenda item under consideration. Both members and observers are informed of all informal consultations and inter-sessional meetings, and all documents including advance copies are made available both to members and to observers on a regular basis to New York missions and their respective capitals.

C. Executive Board of the World Food Programme

46. The membership of the WFP Executive Board reflects the equitable geographical representation called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/162 (annex I, para. 24). Like the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF, the WFP

Board has 36 members; however, its geographic representation, that is, the number of seats by regional group, differs slightly from that of the Boards of the other agencies. In 1996, the Board's members are as follows: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, France, Germany, Haiti, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mauritania, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

47. In line with paragraphs 26 and 27 of annex I to resolution 48/162, the Board held the following sessions in 1996: first regular session (22-23 January); second regular session (22-24 May); and annual session (27-30 May). The third regular session is scheduled to take place from 21 to 24 October, at which time the Board will discuss the programme of work for 1997. It is anticipated that, in accordance with the decisions taken by the Board at its first regular session in 1996, three regular sessions and an annual session will also be held in 1997.

48. The Board decided at its first regular session that, in the absence of its own rules of procedure, it would use the rules provided by resolution 48/162 and the rules of procedure of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes where the former were insufficient. It would revise those rules as it found necessary and useful, with a view to codifying its own rules after a suitable period of operation.

49. As stipulated in paragraph 27 of annex I to resolution 48/162, with the transformation of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes into the Executive Board of WFP, all formal sessions and informal meetings have been held at the premises of WFP headquarters. The necessary facilities were made available by WFP through a restructuring of a segment of its premises, without prejudice to the resources of existing programmes and projects, as called for in paragraph 27.

50. The Board agreed on the following principles of participation, at its sessions, of United Nations and FAO member States other than those that were elected members of the Board, in line with the specifications of paragraph 27, namely that:

(a) The right of participation, without the right to vote, shall also be reserved to a member State when its country programme is under consideration; in the case of WFP, this includes development projects;

(b) The Board will invite members of the United Nations and FAO, which are not members of the Board:

(i) Upon request, to attend the annual session of the Board as observers;

(ii) Upon request and manifestation of a special interest, to attend regular sessions of the Board as observers;

(iii) Such participation will be without the right to vote.

51. In paragraph 78 of annex I to its resolution 50/227, the General Assembly requested that the effective participation of observer member States and observer States in the Board sessions be facilitated and that the Board's documentation be made accessible to all member States. The WFP Board has paid special attention to facilitating such participation by deciding, inter alia, at its second regular session that all observer delegations should be enabled to have proper access to Executive Board room facilities. Moreover, all Board documentation is fully accessible to observer States. It is automatically forwarded to those delegations having expressed the desire to participate in Board sessions.

52. By confirming the further use of the rules of procedure of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes, where the rules provided by resolution 48/162 are insufficient, the Board agreed to the continued use of existing rules for decision-making, as called for in paragraph 27 of annex I to the resolution. The practice of striving for consensus is specifically encouraged in rule VIII.1 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

53. In paragraph 28 of annex I to resolution 48/162, the General Assembly advocated the development of modalities for regular informal briefings and improved information for all member States. In 1996, WFP has continued the tradition established earlier by the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes of convening, prior to formal Board sessions, informal information meetings open to Board members as well as observers, with a view to facilitating the focus on decision-making during the formal sessions. In addition, WFP has provided its conference facilities for frequently held informal meetings of regional groups.

54. There has been no proliferation or overlapping of formal and informal meetings, referred to in paragraph 76 of annex I to resolution 50/227, of the WFP Board. Informal information meetings are open-ended forums used for briefing all permanent representatives without requiring them to take formal decisions, while formal Board sessions are intended to focus on the formulation of and agreement on decisions and recommendations.

55. The delineation of subjects allocated for consideration at the annual and regular sessions, also mentioned in paragraph 76, is decided by the Board when it considers its programme of work for the forthcoming year. Agenda items of a policy nature are mainly scheduled for the annual session, particularly to facilitate the participation of government officials from capitals and to consider reports to the parent bodies (for example, the Economic and Social Council), while operational, resource, financial and administrative matters are usually placed on the agendas of the regular sessions. During the eight months the Board has been in existence, its members have made several adjustments to the agendas, mostly for the purpose of rationalizing procedures. In this vein, the Board decided, at its second regular session, that references to formal statements in the session agendas be abolished, that prepared speeches be avoided and that the Board adopt an open dialogue that encourages a free exchange of ideas.

56. In paragraph 29 of annex I to resolution 48/162, the General Assembly called for the submission to the Economic and Social Council, of an annual

report of each Board on its programmes and activities. The requirement of the provision of an annual report by the WFP governing body to the Economic and Social Council (and the FAO Council) is also stated in WFP general regulation 12. The WFP Board submitted a report on the activities, in 1995, of its predecessor body, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes, for discussion at the substantive session of 1996 of the Economic and Social Council. 13/ Subject to approval of the 1997 programme of work of the Board at its third regular session in 1996, the first report on its own programmes and activities in 1996, taking into account the common structure of such reports as requested by the Economic and Social Council, is scheduled to be approved by the Board at its second regular session in March 1997 and then forwarded in time for discussion at the substantive session of 1997 of the Council.

57. Other reports of the WFP Board, describing how the overall policy guidance and coordination provided by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have been implemented, as requested in paragraph 77 of annex I to resolution 50/227, were submitted to the Council for discussion at its 1996 substantive session. Such reports covered the follow-up of WFP to the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 44/211 of 22 December 1989, 47/199 of 22 December 1992 and 50/120 of 20 December 1995 14/ and to Council resolutions 1995/50, 1995/51 and 1995/56, all of 28 July 1995. 15/

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

58. The Secretary-General addressed the Economic and Social Council on 24 July 1996 and wishes, in the context of the present report, to reiterate a number of views he shared at that time with delegations.

59. The Secretary-General stated that enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations requires further improvement in the coordination and focus of its development activities and that it was essential that this effort be guided by a clear set of priorities and strategies identified by the General Assembly, with the support of the Economic and Social Council, that incorporate the outcomes of recent major international conferences. He went on to say that steps must be taken to enhance the ability of the Assembly to generate substantive solutions to specific policy problems and to further a comprehensive approach to development. A more focused general debate, but also a more thorough examination of a reduced number of themes by the Assembly's committees, would facilitate an integrated consideration of development issues. A necessary corollary to revitalizing the role of the Assembly is to assess possibilities to increase the involvement of relevant non-State actors in its work. With such improvements, better use would be made of the forum of the General Assembly to deal with major economic, social or other issues, which are now largely addressed by separately organized major international conferences.

60. In recognizing that the ongoing efforts to reform the Economic and Social Council have already produced significant improvements in its functioning, the Secretary-General emphasized that further efforts are required to increase the capacity of the Council to monitor and coordinate the work of the United Nations system. The Secretary-General attached special importance to the role of the Council in promoting a coordinated and integrated follow-up to major

international conferences, and was confident that the outcome of the Council's work in 1996 would further enhance its responsibility to draw together in a coherent framework the results of all major United Nations conferences to ensure that they guide the activities of the United Nations system. Reference was made to the need for a better balance in the functioning, responsibilities and authority of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as required by the Charter. Concerning the Economic and Social Council proper, two priority requirements for its revitalization were emphasized: ministerial participation, and increasing involvement of the new players on the global scene in the high-level segment, and further action to enable the Council to exercise an effective role of governance over all the operational funds and programmes of the Organization.

61. General Assembly resolution 50/227, and the Council's discussions during its substantive session of 1996, on the modalities for its implementation, represent, in the view of the Secretary-General, definite progress in these directions. The Secretary-General trusts that this progress will continue. A significant strengthening of the role of the Economic and Social Council in both the policy and the operational areas is not only essential to provide the necessary underpinning for the efforts under way at the Secretariat level to enhance the coherence and improve the functioning and structure of the economic and social sectors of the Organization, but is also a crucial requirement for the strengthening of the system as a whole and for the ultimate success of the overall reform effort.

Notes

1/ E/1996/CRP.3.

2/ E/1996/CRP.3/Rev.1.

3/ E/1994/88, para. 20.

4/ E/1996/CRP.4.

5/ E/1996/103.

6/ E/1995/14.

7/ DP/1996/18/Add.2.

8/ DP/FPA/1996/17 (Part II).

9/ E/ICEF/1996/10 (Part II).

10/ E/1996/69.

11/ E/1996/L.19.

12/ E/ICEF/177/Rev.6.

13/ WFP/EB.A/96/5.

14/ WFP/EB.A/96/7 (Part I).

15/ WFP/EB.A/96/7 (Parts II, III and IV respectively).